



SKI yer *heart* OUT!

» Pilates | *By Jade Winter*

Olympic swimmer and Studio Pilates International co-founder Jade Winter explains how to get your body ski slope-ready, to reduce the risk of injury and maximise fun

{ Snow skiing can be a mixed bag. One minute, you're flying down the slopes; the next, you've crashed and have a mouthful of snow. If you're lucky, you haven't twisted a knee, sprained a wrist, or broken a bone.

The thing is, there are some things you can't control on the slopes: other skiers, the weather, the visibility. However, there are measures you can take to make sure you have full strength in your legs to maximise the fun factor and hopefully prevent any falls.

Ability, skill and experience play the biggest roles in how well you ski, and how many falls and injuries are actually prevented. That said, the better your balance is and the stronger your legs are, the safer you will be and the more efficiently you will get down that hill on your skis.

There are three major muscle groups that need to be trained to give you maximum benefit on the slopes. The first is your quadriceps. This is the group of muscles that sit at the front of your thighs and join onto your knees. They help to straighten the knee, but are also the main muscles that help you to squat down or hold a squat position. And these muscles are incredibly important in maximising your ability to withstand the G-forces you create when you're skiing. As you carve down the slope or turn around a bend, you will feel the resistance that comes up from the ground, your boots and your skis. The stronger your quadriceps muscles are, the more speed you will be able to withstand without your legs giving way underneath you. And that increases the fun factor when you're hurtling down the slopes.

The second muscle group is the gluteals, otherwise known as the buttocks. These play the next biggest role in skiing, and are essential in stabilising

your legs and helping you to balance. Your buttocks actually comprise a group of several muscles. The two major ones are the gluteus maximus – which is largest – and the gluteus medius, which sits more to the side of the hip joint.

All this said, there are many other smaller, yet still important muscles involved in stabilising your legs and body on the snow. They all need to be worked to achieve the best results.

The problem is that most of us have lazy bottoms. Let's face it, most of the time they are being sat upon and not used! Believe it or not, you can go for a run without actually using your buttock muscles much at all – many of us compensate by using our thigh and calf muscles instead. Not good!

On the other hand, exercises such as lunges and squats, while they're great, tend to work the gluteus maximus only – if at all – and forget the smaller muscles around the sides of the hips. So, without a doubt, the most effective and targeted way to tone your buttocks is by doing some simple Pilates exercises. These target not only the larger muscles, but also all of the smaller ones, giving you the strength to stabilise your legs in an active and dynamic sport such as skiing.

Finally, the third muscle group that will help to improve your skiing is your abdominals. Your abdominal muscles

help you to balance and also prevent back pain – important for a happy and healthy skiing holiday! You need to train all of your abdominal muscles to increase your core stability. That means working the different layers of muscle, especially your transversus abdominus.

This muscle is often the hardest of any to activate and is therefore the most often neglected when training your abs. To engage the transversus abdominus, imagine a horizontal line connecting your hip bones on the surface of your stomach. Then, focus on drawing that imaginary line down towards your spine, pulling your hip bones together.

It pays to prepare

It's important to start a focussed exercise and strengthening routine at least 12 weeks before hitting the ski slopes. Your body will take time to change and gain strength, and adapt to your new training.

Combine any Pilates exercises with running for leg endurance and cardio. Also, try to do some rebounding or jumping activities to get your joints ready for the impact you'll encounter from rough terrain or the many bumps and moguls that appear in the snow by the end of the day. And try to exercise most days in the 12 weeks leading up to your ski trip, but make sure you rest when you need it.

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Try these simple Pilates exercises to get your legs and buttocks in top shape before hitting the slopes.



1

100S

Builds endurance in the abdominals to aid balance and prevent back pain.



2

Lie on your back with your knees bent, holding your knees. Curl your ribs to your hips, lifting your head and shoulders. Bring your hands down by your hips and simultaneously extend your legs straight up towards the ceiling – or slightly lower if you want a greater challenge. Draw your belly button in towards your spine to flatten your abdominals. Hold this position for 10 breaths – breathe in for the count of five and breathe out for the count of five – to get to 100.

The clam

Targets the main muscle used to aid balance and helps to stabilise the pelvis. This exercise also helps to prevent back pain.

Lie on your side with your knees bent and in front of you, and your feet tucked back in line with your body. Roll your top hip forwards slightly and keep it there. Create a small space between your waist and the floor, and lift your feet up in the air. Inhale, keeping your knees together. On the exhale, squeeze your top buttock and slowly raise your top knee towards the ceiling, making sure you keep your feet together.

Repeat 30 times each side.



1

2

Straight-leg raise

You need to work your buttocks in different positions to target different muscle groups.

Lie on your side with your bottom leg bent. Straighten your top leg and lift it in line with your body. Maintain a small gap in between your waist and the floor. Inhale and lower your leg, but don't let it touch the floor. Raise it again on the exhale, squeezing your buttocks. Repeat 50 times on each side.



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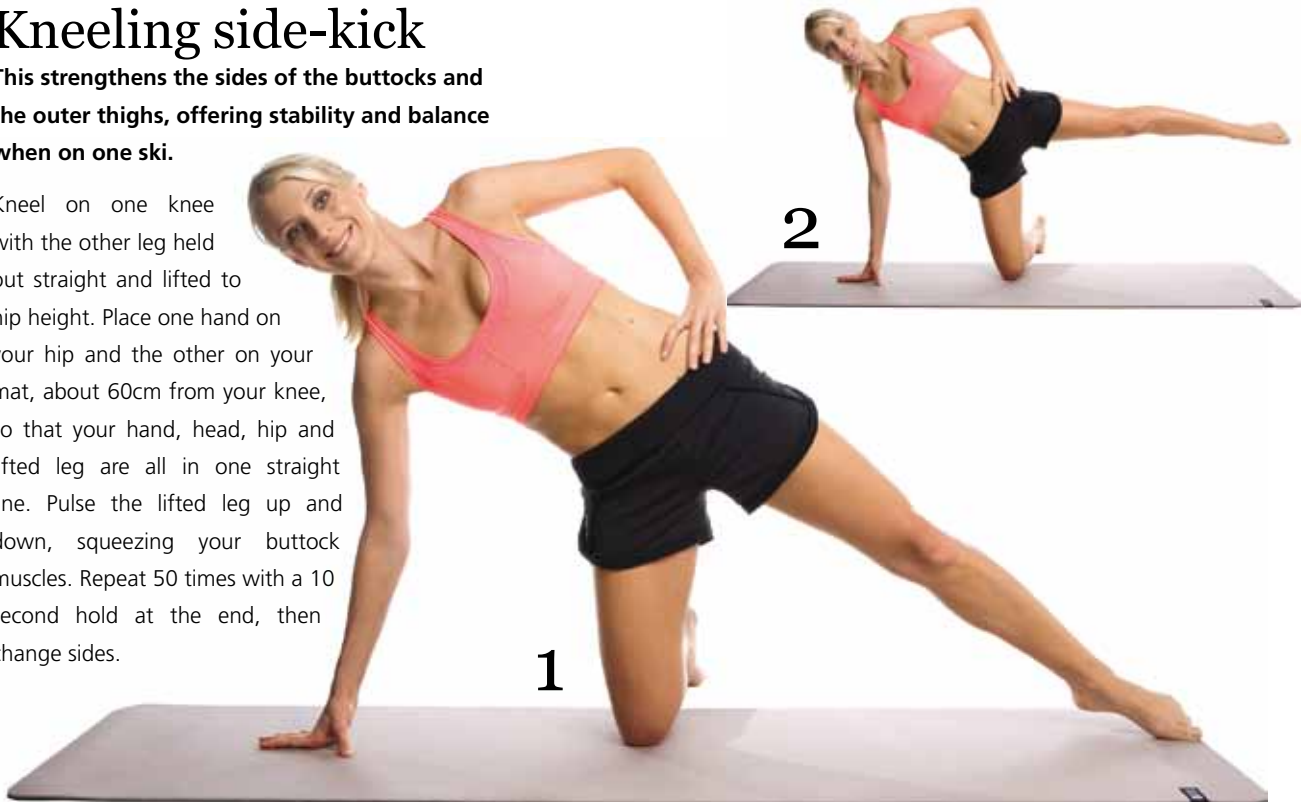
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Kneeling side-kick

This strengthens the sides of the buttocks and the outer thighs, offering stability and balance when on one ski.

Kneel on one knee with the other leg held out straight and lifted to hip height. Place one hand on your hip and the other on your mat, about 60cm from your knee, so that your hand, head, hip and lifted leg are all in one straight line. Pulse the lifted leg up and down, squeezing your buttock muscles. Repeat 50 times with a 10 second hold at the end, then change sides.



Horse kick

Tone the largest buttock muscle, the gluteus maximus.

Kneeling on all fours and keeping your abdominals tight, take one knee off your mat and extend the leg out behind you, squeezing your buttock hard. Return the knee back towards the floor, but don't rest. Continue to extend that leg 20-30 times before swapping sides. Prevent any dipping through your back.



Horse kick 2

Challenge yourself with this.

Still kneeling on all fours, extend your leg out behind you with the leg dead straight. Keeping your pelvis square or parallel with the floor, turn your foot outwards and squeeze your buttock. Keeping your leg turned out, your hips square, and your body dead still, slowly take your leg out to the side, maintaining its height. Repeat 30 times and then change legs.



Hinge

This will strengthen the front of your thighs to give you strength when you're carving turns.

Kneel on the mat with your arms stretched out in front of you at shoulder height. Then, lean your whole body backwards in one line, like a falling tree, hinging from the knees. Hold for a second and then return to vertical.



Jade Winter is co-founder of the Studio Pilates International brand. He is also a former member of the Australian Olympic swimming team. Jade used Pilates as a cross-training tool to enhance his swimming performance, ultimately achieving a world No 1 ranking in his event. He now focuses on fulfilling his business vision of empowering and inspiring one million people to do Studio Pilates International workouts on a daily basis.

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